

# The Ministry of Time Chapter 2

## Summary

The Ministry of Time continues its narrative with Gore boarding the ship, greeted by the distant and muffled figures of the watch, all set against the eerie tilt caused by the surrounding sea ice. As Gore moves below deck, the warmth from the crowded crew stands in stark contrast to the harsh cold he just endured. Despite his own physical exhaustion and mental fog, Gore learns from Stanley, the ship's surgeon, that the date is July 24, 1847. The cold's toll on him is evident as his delayed response to this revelation underscores the overwhelming conditions. Yet, despite his weariness, he insists on attending the emergency command meeting, driven by a sense of duty and the need to contribute to the unfolding crisis. His determination to remain engaged highlights his commitment, even in the face of deteriorating health.

The emergency meeting is convened in the Great Cabin of the *Erebus*, where the atmosphere is suffused with the weight of recent tragedy. Sir John Franklin's death has cast a pall over the crew, and the cabin itself seems to mourn the loss. As Captain Fitzjames steps up to lead, Lieutenant Irving delivers grim news about the dire state of their provisions. The rations aboard the ship have become perilously low, and some of the tinned supplies are not even edible, having been compromised before the ship even departed. The crew's situation grows increasingly dire, as they find themselves battling not just the ice but also the effects of their dwindling supplies. The fragile nature of their survival is laid bare as the reality of their situation sets in, with the ship's crew now facing the consequences of Franklin's ill-fated expedition and the unforgiving conditions of the Arctic.

The meeting continues with Fairholme, the third lieutenant, attempting to frame their predicament in religious terms, but Gore urges a more direct and pragmatic approach.

This shift in tone reflects the growing urgency of their circumstances, as the crew can no longer afford to waste time with abstract thoughts. Fitzjames steps in to clarify the issue with the rations, acknowledging the severity of their dwindling supplies, and then turns to assess the crew's hunting efforts. Gore reports a meager catch of three partridges and a distant gull, which only highlights the harsh reality they are facing. Even the smallest victories in terms of food are no longer enough to sustain the men, emphasizing the futility of their efforts in a landscape that refuses to yield to their needs. The rations are dwindling at a rate too fast to counter, leaving them in a race against time as they struggle to stay alive.

As the crew assesses the remaining provisions, Fitzjames makes the hard decision to reduce the rations to two-thirds, understanding that this will extend their survival but at a significant cost. Stanley, the ship's doctor, voices his concerns about the toll this will take on the sick men, warning that weakening them further could be disastrous. However, Fitzjames insists that this compromise is the only option to ensure the maximum number of men survive long enough to eventually make it back home. The tension between maintaining strength for the journey and preserving life in the present moment reflects the dire straits they are in. The men must balance short-term suffering with the hope of eventual rescue, knowing that any misstep could be fatal. Gore, like the rest of the crew, is left to contemplate the future, wondering how much longer they can survive without breaking.

The chapter concludes with Gore reflecting on the implications of their situation, especially the critical question that hangs over them: what if the ice never breaks? Outside, the shifting ice seems to mock their uncertainty, as the creaking and cracking of the hull signal the ever-present danger that surrounds them. The threat of entrapment is underscored by the sound of the ice shifting ominously, as if the natural world itself is conspiring against their survival. In the midst of this tension, Gore also reflects on the loss of the ship's cat, which, like so many other casualties, succumbed to the brutal conditions. This small death adds to the growing sense of despair that permeates the ship, reinforcing the fragility of life in such a harsh environment. The crew's struggle for survival is not just a battle against the elements, but against their

own dwindling hope, as the relentless Arctic landscape presses in on them from all sides.

